



Taste of Herbs

Melissa Laurita Kohl <melissa@fungiflorafolkschool.com>

Mon, May 30, 2016 at 10:18 AM

To: John Gallagher <jg@learningherbs.com>

Hi John,

Thank you for your long and thoughtful response! It will take me a little bit to digest it, especially with needing to spend so much time on herbal first aid for ducklings (for seizures oh my!) and other such shenanigans I find myself in on the homestead.

Just to clear the air, I did want to address this idea that I based my course on Rosalee's. I can understand why you assumed that, but can assure you that I did not. If you read my course description you referenced, in my opinion it does not sound like her course (it is clearly heavily focused on Ayurveda). The similarity is of course the title, the focus on the tastes, and mentioning the actions associated with tastes (but other authors do that as well, including her mentors K.P. Khalsa and Michael Tierra). However, we mostly approach the tastes in different ways.

I wanted to address this because the tone seems to have shifted from "I am sure this was an innocent mistake" to "you are basically entirely ripping off Rosalee and might not even be acknowledging that in classes". Certainly this is possible and you don't know me personally. I am respectful to a fault and generally have too much integrity to easily navigate this world. I used the same title because I truly thought of "taste of herbs" as a generic name and 5,000 year old concept. I have seen many different herbalists use the same titles. I was not offering an online course and the chance that anyone could possibly confuse our two classes was next to impossible. Not to mention the fact, that the only way anyone would find my class online rather than Rosalee's class, is to search for me directly. Then even if they were interested, they would have to be fairly local to me and I would need to have room in my class. If anything, someone who could not make it to my class could find Rosalee's online class and decide to do that instead. This also means, that perhaps, at a stretch, you might lose a handful of students to me over the next five years, but just as likely, you could pick up students from me because I have been promoting Rosalee and herbmentor. Considering that you are probably the most financially successful herbal educator, I could not imagine how any of this would be an issue, particularly as most of my students are older women who use the internet for email (or not at all), are completely new to herbs, and only know about you and Rosalee through my promotion.

I imagine thinking that I completely ripped off Rosalee's course would lead to distress for both you and Rosalee. So I want to address this point first as it is the most important one to me. This week is a little wild so it may take me a few days to have time to think and write back to the rest of the email, but this does not feel like a particularly time sensitive issue. I am running the class in less than two weeks so I cannot make any changes to my marketing, which means we have some time to sort this out.

While I own Rosalee's course since 2013 (and think it is beautiful), I purchased it because of a pre-existing love of this concept and a plan to teach it. I am only about 20% to 30% through and did not base my course on hers. If we are being honest, I have been a big fan of Rosalee as a teacher for years (before she was popular), but I have ADHD and it is very hard for me to make it through any of her videos. She can only influence me so much when I cannot focus on what she is saying (I need a lot of inflection and emotion to be able to pay attention). I have not watched a single video of herbal cold care either, but I like the idea that I can, especially if I am puttering around the house cleaning (I have offered an "Herbs for Winter Health" class twice already, so obviously her work is not influencing that class). I think "Herbs in Practice" is a brilliant idea, but it cannot influence my practice because I can't make it more than a few minutes in unless I really force myself - which I did once so I have made it through one video. This is in no way a put down. It might be easy for you to think that I am lying about her influence on my teaching. I share this so that you understand that I mean what I say. Most adults are not ADHD so it is clearly not an issue for her. Also, it's not just her videos and webinars. It's a challenge for me with a variety of teachers. I don't think I am even 20% through K.P. Khalsa's "Culinary Herbalism", which I have had since 2011.

Which means, I am most influenced by the teachers I study with in person (including my TCM teacher Scott Moylan, my primary herbal teacher Rosemary Gladstar, and other teachers I have studied with in person including Guido Mase, David Winston, and Kathleen Maier). I am also strongly influenced by Candis Cantin as I am taking her Integrative Herbology Correspondence Course, which comes with audio recordings. She is a very dynamic speaker and I have listened to her recordings multiple times. I am also a voracious reader, and tend to read a dozen or so books at once, popping back and forth, reading outside, etc., so authors are also a significant influence.

I do mention to my students that Rosalee does an online course, which is a little different because she incorporates Chinese energetics as well (in case anyone is inspired to take her course after they get excited by the concept of tastes through my class). I have her flavor wheel poster hanging up in my classroom as I have many herbal posters hanging up, but I never refer to it except to mention that she has this course and I also promote herbmentor to my students. Her flavor wheel would confuse my students because I do not cover energetics the same way that she does. Hers is a more planetary approach (to steal a concept from Michael Tierra 😊) or at least seems to have a lot more TCM in it. She also focuses far more on the actions of herbs, while I focus more on the way they relate to the doshas, the emotional implications, the experiences that are also bitter or sweet, and any scientific research that could tie in as well (Guido Mase is a great source for this, particularly in the sweet, pungent, and bitter categories and David Winston is great for the sweet taste). Maybe the bonus course she added on constitutions goes into the Ayurvedic concept of doshas, but honestly, I would have no idea as I have not watched it.

I have attached one of the handouts from the class so that you can see the strong Ayurvedic perspective, the original language and concepts, and the fact that there is very little in common with Rosalee's work (any commonality would be the result of both of us drawing from traditional systems). To be clear, I am not submitting this to LearningHerbs or Herbmentor, I am just showing it to you so that you understand what I am offering and I retain all rights to the content. While I am sure I was influenced to some degree by Rosalee's course, I was much more influenced by the dozen Ayurvedic books on the topic that I read along with the course on Ayurveda that I took (for a brilliant take on the tastes of herbs see Robert Svoboda's "Prakriti" - I find the emotional aspects of the tastes to be the most interesting piece - Rosalee mentions them with a quote in the beginning of some videos, but I do not think she really goes into it - at least I don't remember anything about it). Honestly, some of the Ayurvedic texts have the exact same description for the tastes with no citations so either there are some copyright issues in the American Ayurvedic world or the original creator of this language was like Rosemary Gladstar and was not attached to intellectual property.

Whenever I have used an authors exact words or original concepts, I have cited them in my handouts or promoted them in class. In an 8 page handout on the sweet taste, I cited 1 line from Rosalee's course (a list of the actions associated with the sweet flavor). If anything, this benefits her and I could easily delete it because the actions are all tied to Ayurvedic concepts except for one that is a Chinese concept that has no bearing on what I am teaching. I do focus on demulcent and adaptogen/immunomodulating concepts but these are clearly Ayurvedic concepts of sweet. I never mention vulnerary (in the concept of sweet just in my astringent class) or blood and yin tonics and I honestly have no idea what she says in the intro to the sweet taste so any overlap there is because we both based our work on traditional concepts. Of the four recipes shared in the handout, three are my own and one is a traditional Ayurvedic formula. In my bitters class, in addition to the Ayurvedic perspective, I draw from Guido Mase and Jim McDonald's work (and promote their materials and them as teachers). I honestly don't think I have watched one video in the bitter section of Rosalee's taste of herbs course, but I could have when I first got the course. As someone who has been studying herbalism for 18 years, 9 of those with a wide range of wonderful teachers, I had already learned much about bitters, astringents (which I do as a separate taste), sour and fermented foods, adaptogens, nourishing herbs and seaweeds (first from Rosemary Gladstar), and aromatic or pungent herbs. Of those, I was least familiar with seaweeds, so it was helpful to watch Rosalee's video on seaweed. I referred to the fact that seaweed has potassium salts as opposed to sodium salts and let my students know that I gleaned that from Rosalee. I was particularly excited about this as I let my students taste potassium salt and talk about it's benefit and uses.

This was an interesting perspective:

"Something to note is that when you are designing a course, even if it's your own words... and it's based on someone else's course... you always have to honor that teacher and mention them when teaching. Rosalee ALWAYS does this in classes she designs and something that's part of our LearningHerbs culture. Even Rosemary Gladstar herself does this in several videos in Rosemary's Remedies. So, in your class, you would naturally mention Rosalee and Taste of Herbs being a source of your body of teaching... and this is another place where also calling your class "taste of herbs" would be awkward. "

Again, Dr. Robert Svoboda, Candis Cantin, Michael Tierra, K.P. Khalsa, Vasant Lad, David Fawley, Anne McIntyre, Maya Tiwari, Kate Gilday, David Winston, Dr. Claudia Welsh, James Green, David Hoffman, Guido Mase, Jim McDonald, Rosemary Gladstar, Robin Rose Bennet, Michael Shor, Scott Moylan, Kathleen Maier, Dr. Mary Bove, Talia Lutzger, Matthew Wood, Rosalee de la Foret and one other Indian author who is lesser known (but whose name I cannot remember and his two books are at my herb school) were all direct influences on this class and all acknowledged where appropriate (there is a lot of repetition, especially in Ayurveda, or basic western herbal concepts concerning astringents, nourishing herbs, etc.). This is not a list of everyone I have studied with (I have studied with many more teachers). This is just everyone whose work I used directly or indirectly in this class.

Rosalee's influence was minor compared to the Ayurvedic teachers, Rosemary Gladstar, and Guido Mase. I liked that she linked the tastes to herbal actions, but so did some other authors (with far less emphasis). I think you would be hard pressed to find Rosalee's direct influence in this 8 page handout I have attached (or in any of my handouts).

That being said, when I tell my students that Rosalee offers an online "Taste of Herbs" course, there is no awkwardness whatsoever. The herbal community, at least in Vermont, is very open and collaborative.

Also, you might want to know that the full name of this class is "This is Herbalism: Level Two - The Taste of Herbs" but as I am just starting out, marketing it with the full name would be a bad idea. Also, I cannot afford to turn away new students as I do not have enough level one students who can take the class but my Level 1 students were clamoring for a next level class. Anyone new takes a mini intro class to catch up. In this sense, I did not feel that offering "The Taste of Herbs" as part of a longer series of classes was any different from it being offered in TCM and Ayurvedic courses all over the country. My course is not a stand alone class. The one I taught in Feb/March as a 7 week series had a three hour intro class for anyone who had not taken by Level 1 class (which is an 8 week series). The weekend I am offering in less than two weeks has the intro built into the weekend as the taste of herbs cannot stand by itself the way that I teach it.

Obviously, there is more to address and for you the registered trademark piece might be your biggest concern, but I was struck by the idea that rather than this being an innocent mistake, I am somehow all around acting unethically. I wish I could act unethically, even a little bit, but I was raised by a hardass Italian mama who held me to very high moral standards. I hope that after reading this, you agree that it was an innocent mistake, and we can move on to the trademark issue itself. You are welcome to share my handout with Rosalee as well.

Cheers,
Melissa

--

Why should a man die when he has sage growing in his garden? - Medieval Proverb
www.fungiflorafolkschool.com



MadhuraRasaHERBSTALK2.pdf

1884K